

Message Text

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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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CINCPAC

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 7864

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CB

SUBJ: GKR CABINET CRISIS

1. REGARDLESS OF OUR PERSONAL PREFERENCES, KHMER LEADERS LOOK TO US IN TIME OF CRISIS FOR HELP AND GUIDANCE. THIS WAS BROUGHT OUT AGAIN SATURDAY, JUNE 8, WHEN BOTH PRIME MINISTER LONG BORET AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY VICE PRESIDENT PAN SOTHI ASKED TO MEET WITH ME TO DISCUSS CABINET CRISIS. FROM THESE LENGTHY CONVERSATIONS, I GATHER PROBLEM IS THE FOLLOWING: PRIOR TO ASSASSINATION OF THE TWO GKR OFFICIALS, THE FOUR REPUBLICAN MINISTERS IN THE CABINET HAD REFUSED TO TESTIFY BEFORE THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WHICH THE REPUBLICAN PARTY DOES NOT RECOGNIZE. THIS IN TURN HAD LED TO CONSIDERABLE STRAIN BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY; STUDENT RIOTING AND THE ASSASSINATIONS FURTHER EXACERBATED THIS FRICTION. BOTH THE REPUBLICANS AND SOCIO-REPUBLICANS, HEADED BY SIRIK MATAK AND LON NOL RESPECTIVELY, WISH TO MAINTAIN THE HARD-FOUND ALLIANCE BETWEEN THESE TWO PARTIES BUT THE IMPASSE WITH PARLIAMENT MAKES CONTINUATION OF THIS COOPERATION DIFFICULT. SITUATION IS FURTHER COMPLICATED BY LACK OF DISCIPLINE OVER THE 126 DEPUTIES WHO RESPOND TO NO ONE BUT BASICALLY ARE IRRESPONSIBLE FREE AGENTS. LON NOL CLEARLY IS UNABLE TO CONTROL THEM. COMPOUNDING PRESENT

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POLITICAL IMPASSE IS DESIRE OF MOST CABINET MEMBERS NOT TO

GET TAINTED BY ASSOCIATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT FOR WHAT THEY CONSIDER TO HAVE BEEN GOVERNMENT FAILURE TO SAVE THE TWO GKR OFFICIALS WHO WERE ASSASSINATED. IRRESPONSIBLE AND ERRONEOUS PRESS REPORTS--PARTICULARLY INITIAL FALSE UPI STORY--HAS BEEN GRIST ON THE MILL FOR THOSE WHO WISH TO HOLD GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF THESE TWO MINISTERS. THE FACT THAT GKR SHOWED GREAT RESTRAINT IN DEALING WITH THE STUDENT RIOTS AND THAT THE GKR OFFICIALS WERE MURDERED BY KILLERS ACTING ON BEHALF OF SUBVERSIVE ELEMENTS APPEARS TO BE LOST SIGHT OF. EVEN LONG BORET IS DISCOURAGED BY THESE ACCUSATIONS WHICH BLAME HIM FOR GKR'S FAILURE TO SHOW FIRMNESS IN DEALING WITH STUDENT RIOTS.

2. VICE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PAN SOTHI WHO HAD BEEN ONE OF THE KEY MANEUVERERS IN TRYING TO BRING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT BEEN CHARGED BY THE MARSHAL WITH THE MISSION OF EXPLORING WAYS OF RESOLVING CABINET CRISIS. IN THE ONE AND HALF HOURS HE SPENT WITH ME AND ADCM GARDNER, PAN SOTHI WAS NOT CLEAR HOW THIS CRISIS COULD BE SOLVED. IN HIS CONVERSATION, HOWEVER, HE MOUTHED ALL THE RIGHT THEMES ABOUT NATIONAL UNITY, LONG BORET'S GOOD RECORD AS PRIME MINISTER, AND IRRESPONSIBILITY OF PARLIAMENTARIANS. HE IS CONTINUING HIS CONSULTATIONS WITH OTHER POLITICAL ELEMENTS AND WILL SEE ME AGAIN EVENING JUNE 9.

3. PRIME MINISTER, WHOM I SAW DURING MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, SET FORTH FOLLOWING SIX ALTERNATIVES FOR RESOLVING CABINET CRISIS:

(A) MAINTAIN STATUS QUO IN CABINET. HE SAYS THIS COURSE IS UNACCEPTABLE TO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, TO PRIME MINISTER, AND TO CABINET MEMBERS. EVERYBODY AGREES A CHANGE IS REQUIRED TO BREAK IMPASSE WITH PARLIAMENT AND ALSO TO DEFUSE CRITICISM OF WAY CABINET HANDLED STUDENT RIOTS.

(B) MAINTAIN PRESENT MIX OF REPUBLICANS/SOCIO-REPUBLICANS IN THE GOVERNMENT BUT CHANGE FACES IN THE COMPOSITION OF THE CABINET. THIS BASICALLY WOULD NOT SOLVE PROBLEM OF REPUBLICANS' REFUSAL TO APPEAR BEFORE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, HENCE IS NOT A REALISTIC ALTERNATIVE.

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(C) ENLARGE THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL WITH SOME OF THE PRESTIGIOUS REPUBLICAN AND INDEPENDENT PERSONALITIES AND ESTABLISH CABINET OF TECHNICIANS COMPOSED EXCLUSIVELY OF SOCIO-REPUBLICANS AND INDEPENDENTS. THE ADVANTAGE OF THIS ALTERNATIVE IS ABSENCE OF REPUBLICANS IN THE CABINET. IT THEREFORE WOULD CIRCUMVENT PROBLEM OF REPUBLICANS' REFUSAL TO APPEAR BEFORE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. REPUBLICANS WOULD

HAVE STRONGER REPRESENTATION IN "POLICY MAKING" EXECUTIVE

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COUNCIL AND ARGUMENT COULD BE MADE THAT ALLIANCE BETWEEN REPUBLICANS AND SOCIO-REPUBLICANS CONTINUES TO BE IN OPERATION. DRAWBACK TO THIS SCHEME IS EXECUTIVE COUNCIL NOW FUNCTIONS QUITE EFFECTIVELY BECAUSE ONLY THE FOUR KEY KHMER LEADERS MAKE UP THIS BODY AND DILUTING IT WITH REPUBLICAN LEADER OP KIM ANG OR OTHER LIGHTWEIGHTS RISK MAKING IT LESS EFFECTIVE BODY.

(D) FORM CABINET WITH PERSONALITIES REPRESENTING NO POLITICAL PARTY BUT MERELY EACH MEMBER QUALIFYING FOR MEMBERSHIP ON BASIS TECHNICAL QUALITICATIONS. HENCE REPUBLICANS WOULD SERVE AS TECHNICIANS RATHER THAN REPRESENTATIVES OF REPUBLICAN PARTY. PRIME MINISTER BELIEVES THIS SOLUTION WOULD NOT BE ACCEPTABLE TO THE REPUBLICANS.

(E) A VARIATION OF (C) WITH ADDITION OF ONE REPUBLICAN TO THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AND A CABINET OF 18 MEMBERS EXCLUDING REPUBLICAN PARTICIPATION. THIS 18-MAN CABINET WOULD BE MADE UP OF 10 INDEPENDENTS AND ONLY 8 SOCIO-REPUBLICANS SO THAT CABINET COULD NOT BE CRITICIZED AS A BODY DOMINATED BY SOCIO-REPUBLICANS. PRIME MINISTER LIKED THIS ALTERNATIVE BECAUSE IT WOULD GIVE HIM AN OPPORTUNIY

OF SELECTING SOME COMPETENT NEW FACES AND THIS SOLUTION
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MIGHT APPEASE BOTH REPUBLICAN PARTY AND PARLIAMENT.

(F) "PUT THE ASSEMBLY TO SLEEP." PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT THIS UNDOUBTEDLY IS BEST SOLUTION BECAUSE ASSEMBLY IS NOT REPRESENTATIVE BODY AND FURTHERMORE LACKS ANY SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY. MOST DEPUTIES ARE SELF-SEEKING, UNDISCIPLINED AND UNREPRESENTATIVE INDIVIDUALS WHICH MAKES IT PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR ANY GOVERNMENT TO WORK WITH ASSEMBLY. LONG BORET POINTED OUT THAT ASSEMBLY HAD BEEN "MISE EN VEILLEUSE" ONCE BEFORE WITH GOOD RESULTS AND "NATION IN DANGER" LEGISLATION ENACTED BY PARLIAMENT LAST MONTH GIVES LON NOL AUTHORITY TO DO THE SAME AGAIN. HE THINKS THAT TEMPORARY RECESS OF ASSEMBLY WOULD DEFUSE MANY PROBLEMS; WHEN TAKING SUCH ACTION, PRESIDENT WOULD ADD THAT PRIME MINISTER WOULD GIVE DETAILED REPORT ON GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES WHEN ASSEMBLY CONVENES AGAIN LATER THIS YEAR. ACCORDING TO PRIME MINISTER, PRESIDENT LON NOL PERSONALLY FAVORS RECESSING OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, AS DO MOST RESPONSIBLE OFFICIALS, BUT PRESIDENT FEARS THAT THIS MIGHT HAVE ADVERSE REACTION IN U.S. WHEN I ASKED WHETHER SUCH ACTION WOULD LEAD TO STREET DEMONSTRATIONS, PRIME MINISTER REPLIED THAT MOST LEADERS HE CONSULTED DO NOT THINK THIS WOULD SERIOUSLY AFFECT POLITICAL STABILITY. PRESSED BY THE PRIME MINISTER FOR A REPLY, I STATED THAT KHMER DECISION MUST BE BASED ON WHAT IS MOST EFFECTIVE DOMESTICALLY TO REESTABLISH POLITICAL EQUILIBRIUM; I ALSO SAID THAT I DOUBTED THAT TEMPORARY RECESSING OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WOULD HAVE SIGNIFICANT ADVERSE EFFECT IN U.S. WHILE SOME NEWSPAPERS MIGHT INTERPRET IT AS UNDEMOCRATIC ACT, GKR HAS RECENTLY GIVEN MANY INDICATIONS OF ITS MODERATION RESTRAINT AND DEMOCRATIC ORIENTATION AS FOR EXAMPLE LIFTING PRESS CENSORSHIP, HANDLING OF STUDENT UNREST, ETC.

4. PRIME MINISTER HIMSELF IS DISCOURAGED BY PETTY MANEUVERING OF LOCAL POLITICIANS AND FAILURE OF KHMERS TO DO MORE THAN GIVE LIP SERVICE TO GKR EFFORTS BRING ALL ELEMENTS TOGETHER IN FACE OF ENEMY THREAT. IT TOOK ME MORE THAN AN HOUR TO PERSUADE HIM THAT HE APPEARS TO BE THE ONLY LEADER ON THE SCENE WHO CAN PUT TOGETHER ANOTHER GOVERNMENT AND WE WERE IMPRESSED BY HIS RECORD OF MAKING HARD DECISIONS AND THAT
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THEREFORE, HE SHOULD STAY AT THE HELM. ALTHOUGH WE CANNOT EXCLUDE POSSIBILITY THAT LONG BORET WILL TAKE THE EASY WAY OUT BY REFUSING A NEW APPOINTMENT AS PRIME MINISTER AFTER TENDERING HIS RESIGNATION, I BELIEVE THIS CAN BE PREVENTED BY TEMPORARILY RECESSING THE PARLIAMENT WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY ENLARGING AND STRENGTHENING THE CABINET. IF OTHER KEY KHMER ADVANCE THIS SOLUTION, I WILL NOTE THAT WE SEE NO OBJECTIONS TO SUCH A COURSE OF ACTION.

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